

7 February 1962

KHRUSHCHEV'S "WE WILL BURY YOU"

The "we will bury you" threat widely attributed to Khrushchev in the Western press was reported to have been made at a send-off reception for Poland's Gomulka in Moscow in November 1956. According to TIME Magazine, Khrushchev was overheard to say "at the final reception" for the Polish leader:

If you don't like us, don't accept our invitations and don't invite us to come to see you. Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you!

The final reception for Gomulka was held at the Polish Embassy in Moscow on 18 November 1956. Moscow's purported text of Khrushchev's remarks at this gathering, though edited to tone down some of the Soviet leader's more intemperate language, contains what is probably a sanitized version of the above passage. It does not include the "we will bury you" remark as such, but concludes with a typical elaboration of the notion that history is on the side of socialism:

We tell representatives of the capitalist countries: If you like, you can come and visit us; if you do not--you need not come. This will not upset us unduly. Coexistence is necessary to us all. ... We Leninists are convinced that our social order, socialism, will in the long run conquer capitalism. Such is the logic of the historical development of mankind.

Nearly a full year later, on 5 October 1957, TASS publicized a statement by the Soviet delegation to the U.N. General Assembly complaining about Ambassador Lodge's references to "pronouncements allegedly made by N.S. Khrushchev on 17 November 1956":\*

The words which Mr. Lodge insists were said by Khrushchev on 17 November--"we will bury you"--are the fruit of idle talk by those who are instructed to handicap the improvement of Soviet-American relations....

Khrushchev on five subsequent occasions publicly denied having made various versions of the "bury you" remark: He flatly and indignantly

\* Ambassador Lodge had given 17 rather than 18 November as the date of the "we will bury you" remark. Apparent confusion over the date in the West stems from the fact that there were two receptions for Gomulka, one on the 17th and another on the 18th, and Khrushchev ranted against the West at both.

Approved For Release 2002/01/22 : CIA-RDP73B00296R000200040087-1

at the Kremlin at The Polish Embassy

denied having said he would "bury the American people" ("I never said any such rubbish as that"); he flatly denied an intention to destroy capitalism by means of war ("no, I have never said this and never will"); and he explained--three times--that he did not mean digging capitalism's grave "in the physical sense." On 16 September 1959, asked at the National Press Club in Washington about the "we will bury you" threat, he said:

I really spoke about that, but my statement was deliberately distorted. What I meant was not the physical burying of anyone or at any time, but a change of the social system in the historical development of society....

Khrushchev and other Soviet spokesmen have in fact used the "burial of capitalism" figure of speech a number of times. They have used it occasionally in predicting that capitalism will perish in the event of a thermonuclear war--still the official Soviet line, despite the increasing frankness with which Soviet spokesmen over the past five years have acknowledged the great damage such a war would bring to both sides. But the forecasts of capitalism's demise, or "burial," have most often been made in an ideological rather than a military context: The ultimate death of capitalism is pictured not as resulting from a Soviet military victory, but as a result of inevitable rejection by "the peoples" of a system (capitalism) which breeds wars in favor of a better system (socialism) which ensures peace.

Part I of the attached compilation reproduces TIME's report of the "we will bury you" remark. Part II reproduces the Soviet denials and explanations. Part III contains some of the statements Khrushchev has made, and Soviet media have publicized, about the eventual "burial" of capitalism by its own hand, by "mankind," or by "the proletariat."

I. TIME MAGAZINE'S ACCOUNT  
(in the issue of 26 November 1956)

"We Will Bury You!"

At the final reception for Poland's visiting Gomulka, stubby Nikita Khrushchev planted himself firmly with the Kremlin's whole hierarchy at his back, and faced the diplomats of the West, and the satellites, with an intemperate speech that betrayed as much as it threatened.

"We are Bolsheviks!" he declared pugnaciously. "We stick firmly to the Lenin precept--don't be stubborn if you see you are wrong, but don't give in if you are right." "When are you right?" interjected First Deputy Premier Mikoyan--and the crowd laughed. Nikita plunged on, turning to the Western diplomats. "About the capitalist states, it doesn't depend on you whether or not we exist. If you don't like us, don't accept our invitations, and don't invite us to come to see you. Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you!"

II. DENIALS AND EXPLANATIONS OF THE "WE WILL BURY YOU" REMARK

Speaking in the General Committee 30 September, Mr. Lodge, representative of the United States to the 12th General Assembly session, said the USSR allegedly made no secret, and that this was more than once implied by Mr. Khrushchev, about its unwillingness to coexist peacefully with the United States. In confirmation of this absolutely groundless statement, Mr. Lodge referred to pronouncements allegedly made by N.S. Khrushchev on 17 November 1956.

Such assertions by Mr. Lodge do not tally with facts. It is a matter of common knowledge that, from the very first days of its existence, the Soviet Union has always stood for peaceful coexistence among states, irrespective of their social systems. This refers to the United States as well. In its relations with other states, the Soviet Union has proved its desire to base relations with other countries on the principles of peaceful coexistence.

The words which Mr. Lodge insists were said by Khrushchev on 17 November--"we will bury you"--are the fruit of idle talk by those who are instructed to handicap the improvement of Soviet-American relations in every way.

In reality, the speech made by Khrushchev 17 November 1956, during a reception at the Kremlin in honor of the delegation of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party and the Government of the Polish People's Republic contained other things, which Mr. Lodge could have learned from the Soviet papers of 18 November 1956.

"The Soviet Government," Khrushchev said on 17 November, "will untiringly strive to consolidate peace, to ease international tension. Today's statement of the Soviet Government on the reduction of armaments and the relaxation of international tension is a new confirmation of this stand. We shall strive in every way to consolidate world peace and shall consistently pursue a policy of peaceful coexistence."

In another statement, made on 18 November at a reception in the Polish Embassy in Moscow and published by the press 19 November, Khrushchev said: "There can be no question as to whether peaceful coexistence of different states is necessary. Coexistence means the recognition of facts as they are. We tell the representatives of capitalist countries if you wish, you may call on us as guests. If not, then don't come at all. We won't be greatly disappointed."

"But we need coexistence. After all, what can you do about the fact that the Great October Socialist Revolution did take place, that there is the Soviet Union and a whole system of socialist camp countries.

"Such is the law of social development--a law which is operating in our favor. We Leninists are convinced that our social system, socialism, will ultimately triumph over capitalism. This is the logical course of mankind's historical development."

[The statement goes on to quote Khrushchev's remarks in a 28 May 1957 interview with CBS about the triumph of socialism, peaceful coexistence, and normalizing relations between the Soviet Union and the United States.]

The quoted authentic pronouncements by N. S. Khrushchev show that Mr. Lodge's assertions are absolutely groundless.

(Statement by the Soviet delegation to the U.N. General Assembly in New York, TASS, 5 October 1957)

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Some of the representatives of the capitalist countries reproach me for allegedly having said that we shall "bury capitalism." I have already said that there is one thing I want, and that is to be understood correctly. The imperialists are digging their own grave; such is their nature. Karl Marx showed a long time ago how this is done; yet they do not understand it even now. I want to say but one thing: Mind, we shall not dig your grave in the physical sense. If you like the capitalist regime so well continue to live under capitalism as long as you can, how long it will be I cannot tell. We do not interfere in your internal affairs; but neither must you interfere in the way we want to live, in our internal affairs. Let us better compete at who is going to produce more per capita. For instance, this excellent ham which our Polish friends offered us here today. If capitalism will do this, it means it will live longer; if socialism will do it, it means the term of capitalism will be cut short.

(Khrushchev speech at Polish Embassy in Moscow, 4 September 1959)

Question: You are often quoted as having said at one diplomatic reception that you will bury us. If you did not say that, perhaps you will deny that statement, and if you did, will you explain what you meant?

Khrushchev: Here in this hall there is present but a small fraction of America. It would take more than my life span if I conceived the idea of burying all of you. I really spoke about that, but my statement was deliberately distorted. What I meant was not physical burying of anyone or at any time, but a change of the social system in the historical development of society. Every educated person knows that at the present time there exists more than one social system in the world. Various states, various people, have different systems. The social system changes with the development of society. There was a feudalism which was supplanted by capitalism. Capitalism provided better conditions for the development of productive forces. But capitalism begot irreconcilable contradictions. Every system, when it outlives its time, begets its heirs. Capitalism, as Marx, Engels, and Lenin have proved, will be replaced by communism. We believe that. Many of you do not believe in that. But in your country, too, there are people who believe in it.

At the reception in question, I said that during historical development and in the historical sense capitalism will be buried; that capitalism will be supplanted with communism. You might say that this cannot be. But is it not a fact that the feudals burned at the stake people who fought against feudalism? But nevertheless capitalism has triumphed. Capitalism is fighting against communism. I am convinced that communism...will win.

(Khrushchev during a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, 16 September 1959)

I hope you understand why I repeat some well-known truths. Such is the development of world history that two social systems now exist on earth--socialism and capitalism. These social systems are antagonistic. We, the people of the socialist camp, are convinced that the hour of capitalism has struck, that this is an obsolete system. The proponents of capitalism, embellishing and whitewashing their system, seek to extend its duration. You remember that I was accused in the United States of trying nearly physically to bury each capitalist. The communists, understanding the inevitability of the downfall of capitalism and rejoicing that such an hour will come, nevertheless are not guided in their actions by naive sentiments and ideas and do not intend to bury every capitalist, for they understand that capitalism is its own gravedigger.

It would be truer to say, when the question arises as to who will bury whom, that the gravedigger of capitalism, as Karl Marx said, will be the working class. And I, as a member of the Communist Party, a member of the great and mighty workers class, do not exclude myself from the ranks of gravediggers of capitalism. The working class of every country will be proud to fulfill this historic mission of burying capitalism and to create a new, socialist-communist society.

(Khrushchev speech at the Third Rumanian Workers Party Congress in Bucharest, 21 June 1960)

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You may remember my speech in America when I said that your grandchildren will live under communism. I do not say that we shall destroy capitalism by means of war. No, I have never said this and never will. I said that the development of human society leads to a progressive regime winning over an obsolete regime. Therefore, capitalism, having played out its positive part, has grown old, and socialism and communism are coming to take its place.

It is thus not we communists in the Soviet Union or communists in other socialist countries, not communists in capitalist countries, but the peoples in each country who will choose for themselves the system under which they will live better. We are convinced that sooner or later all the people on earth will choose and give their preference to the socialist system; and communists, as the most advanced detachment of the working class, are leading and pointing the way for the movement of the working class and all working people. This is quite a different thing, and it is in essence diametrically

II-5

opposed to the statements of some brash orators in the United States who are gathering themselves for a campaign for the destruction of communism.

(Khrushchev letter to Prime Minister Macmillan, 4 August 1960)

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Asked if he still wanted to bury the American people, Khrushchev said: "I never said any such rubbish as that. Only a madman could get such an idea. The people will live forever and develop."

(Radio Moscow report on Khrushchev's "spontaneous" press conference on the balcony of the house of the Soviet U.N. delegation in New York, 22 September 1960)

III-1

III. SOME KHRUSHCHEV FORECASTS OF THE BURIAL OF CAPITALISM

The actual correlation of forces is such that the militarists and monopolists should think, and think twice, before launching a war. We are convinced that if war breaks out--and it can be started only by the imperialist countries, since none of the socialist countries wants war--capitalism will be defeated and this will be the last ordeal inflicted upon humanity by the capitalist world, because capitalism will be buried once and for all.

(Interview with Henry Shapiro of UP, 14 November 1957)

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The process of historic development is inexorable. It cannot be stopped by any reactionary forces. Should they try to do so by force of arms and unleash war, they will dig their graves with their own hands. The peoples will no longer tolerate a regime which gives birth to wars and brings to mankind torment and suffering.

(Speech at Supreme Soviet session, 21 December 1957)

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The capitalists try to establish the lowest possible pay for labor and to extract higher profits by intensifying exploitation of the working people. The working class, on the other hand, desires to improve its living conditions and receive more for its labor and, through class struggle, to throw off the cruel yoke of exploitation, the yoke of capitalist wage slavery.

Marx and Engels proved, on the basis of profound scientific analysis, that the collapse of capitalism and the victory of socialism, which would replace it, were inevitable, and they advanced and substantiated the world-historic role of the proletariat as the gravedigger of capitalism and the creator of a communist society, a society without classes, without exploitation and oppression.

(Report to the CPSU Central Committee plenum, 6 May 1958)

III-2

Marx discovered the law of the development of society and proved on the basis of a profound study of the course of development of capitalist production that capitalism digs its own grave because it restrains the development of productive forces, gives birth to crises and poverty; because under the capitalist production system the riches are concentrated in the hands of a small group of exploiters, while millions of working people, who create those riches, remain beggars and are deprived of any rights.

(Speech in Ryasan Oblast, 13 February 1959)

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Several madmen in the imperialists' camp are threatening the world with their atomic and hydrogen bombs and with force. So what? By their reckless policy, they are bringing nearer the end of the capitalist world, the time when mankind will be able to bury capitalism more deeply.

(Speech in Vlore, Albania, 31 May 1959)

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The imperialists hate the socialist system. They hate the Marxist-Leninist doctrine. That is a matter of their personal convictions, but not a reason for starting a war. We do not have any sympathy for the capitalist system either, but we do not want to force our system on other countries by means of arms. Let capitalism end its life like an old horse, which becomes senile and finally stretches its legs, whereupon its owner throws it down the slope. The more imperialism displays its irreconcilable contradictions, which lead to peoples' misery and to war, the more quickly it reveals itself and shows its ulcers, the more quickly will this arouse the wrath and hatred of the peoples living in imperialist countries. By exacerbating the international atmosphere and creating all kinds of crises and phenomena dangerous to the cause of peace, imperialism arouses the wrath of the people and digs its own grave.

(Speech at Supreme Soviet session, 5 May 1960)

III-3

Robert Cass, of 24621 (O'Neider?) Boulevard, Oak Park 37, Michigan, asks: "Has Nikita Khrushchev ever said: 'We will bury you?' If so, when and where did he say this? Why did he say it? What did he mean by this remark?"

Joe Adamov replies: When Mr. Khrushchev was in the United States in 1959, at the National Press Club on 16 September he was asked the same thing. The question was: "You told a diplomat at a reception that you would bury us. If you didn't say it, you could deny it, and if you did say it, could you please explain what you meant?"

Mr. Khrushchev answered: "I did speak about it, but my statement has been deliberately misconstrued." Then Mr. Khrushchev went on to say that the social system changes as society develops. There was the feudal system; it was superseded by capitalism, he said. Every system gives birth to its successor. Capitalism, as Marx, Engels, and Lenin proved, will be succeeded by communism. We believe in that. Many of you do not. At the reception concerned I said: "In the course of historical progress and in the historical sense, capitalism would be buried and communism would come to replace capitalism. You will say that this is out of the question, but then the feudal lords burnt at the stake those who fought against feudalism, and still capitalism won out."

That is what Mr. Khrushchev said, and he went on: "I am convinced that the winner will be communism, a social system which creates better conditions for the development of a country's productive forces, enables every individual to prove his worth, and guarantees complete freedom in society, for every member of society."

You see, Mr. Cass, you should not take the word "bury" literally. We say that the steamship buried the sailing vessel or the automobile buried the horse and carriage. Very often in political literature you will read that the working class is the grave digger of capitalism. So you see, this word is used not in its direct sense, and don't for a moment think that anybody from the USSR or anybody else is going to come to invade you or to bury you. Socialism and communism will come to this or that country when the conditions are ripe for it there, when the majority of the people in this or that country want socialism; and when socialism does come to this or that country it will be due to the doing of its own people. It cannot be foisted on any country from outside; in other words, a revolution cannot be exported.

(Radio Moscow "Moscow Mailbag" feature, in English to North America, 15 April 1962)

III-4

Cowles: Mr. Chairman, I would like to recall now an incident from the past. I want to recall it because I think that the language barrier between us sometimes raises certain difficulties. You once said something that was translated into English as "We shall bury you." In America, these words were taken as a military threat. I should like to ask you, therefore, what you meant by saying "We shall bury you."

Khrushchev: I think that people who translate statements from one language into another, and especially those who disseminate and interpret them, should always do this with scrupulous honesty. What you speak of happened because some unscrupulous people deliberately twisted a phrase of mine, a very clear statement that capitalism will be buried in the course of the historic development of mankind, that it will be inevitably superseded by communism. In claiming this, I had in mind that society develops according to definite laws. It is changing all the time, the old dies off and the new emerges and develops. America was at one time a colony of Britain, but the American people finally rose up in arms and freed themselves of oppression by Britain. The American people, one might say buried Britain as the colonizer of the U.S. and achieved independence.

There was a time when the feudal system reigned in the majority of the countries in the world. In its time, when this system was just coming into being, it was more progressive than the slave system. Conditions more conducive to the development of the productive forces of society were gradually developing within the feudal system. The time came when feudalism outlived itself. A more progressive system, capitalism, was born within it. Capitalism buried, interred feudalism. True, feudal relations still exist in a number of countries, but in general it can be said that feudalism as a system has been buried, interred, and the countries which were the first to begin to "bury" that system gained in their economic development. Russia, which lingered longer in the stage of the landlord-feudal system, lagged in the development of its economy compared with the other Western countries.

But capitalism engendered irreconcilable contradictions, and a new, progressive social system, communism, with entirely different social relations between people than under capitalism, has appeared to replace it. We are convinced that communism will win, as it provides better conditions for the development of the productive forces of society, provides the conditions for the fullest and most harmonious development of the society in general and for every individual in particular. Capitalism fights against communism, but it is impossible to arrest the process of the development of mankind. Sooner or later communism will win everywhere in the world, and, consequently, communism will bury capitalism.

III-5

This is how my statement should be understood. It is not a question of someone burying someone physically, but of a change in the social system in the course of the historic development of society. When we say that communism will bury capitalism, this does not mean, of course, that the Soviet people, the communists of the Soviet Union, will inter capitalists of this or that country. No, communism is winning in the Soviet Union, and many other countries are now following the road of communist development. Communism is growing out of the dedicated labor and struggle of the peoples of the socialist countries for a new, better, the most just creative life on earth. Such is the teaching of life, of history: a more progressive social system inevitably comes to replace a system which is outliving itself, a progressive system buries a moribund one.

This is how we regard the historic process of the development of society. I have spoken of this more than once. I spoke of this in the United States, too, when I visited your country. We do not impose our communist convictions by force on anybody. We believe that in America, too, mighty forces will grow--they already exist there and are growing and developing all the time. These progressive forces which are growing within the American people itself will ultimately win. In place of capitalism, which reigns in America today, the American people will themselves establish a new social system, and this system will be communism. Thus, it can be said that one system, asserting itself, buries another system, which is outliving itself. It is not that one people buries a part of another. This would be monstrous; this would mean war between states. The question of the victory of one social system over another is one of class struggle. It is a new class which is developing and gaining in strength now--the working class, the people themselves--that will, properly speaking, reign in the world, including the United States....

In corn, we can compete successfully with you, and even beat you, perhaps. I use the word "beat" in the sense of winning the competition, lest you say again that we want to beat you in the sense of "bury" you. See how careful I am in my choice of words.

(Interview with Gardner Cowles, 20 April 1962)

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The other question you brought up is the struggle of the various classes within a capitalist country. This struggle, which has been in existence since the birth of capitalism, will continue in the future, too. The internal contradictions will even increase. Therefore we say that one day capitalism will be defeated. We do not assert that the socialist countries will defeat the presently

III-6

existing capitalist states. However, one day the working class will be victorious in every individual capitalist country.

Your statement that at long last capitalism will take over the successful methods of the socialist system applies to some extent. However, you must not forget that the other side of the capitalist society, namely the working class, will also take over everything worth while in communism. When I spoke in New York before American economic managers, I was shouted down because I asserted that one day communism will bury capitalism. However, I added simultaneously that I am not the gravedigger of capitalism. There are enough workers in the United States to bury the capitalist system. By following the example of the Soviet people, they will dig the grave--not I.

(Interview with Raymong Scheyuen, Belgian Foreign Minister for Economy and Finance, 18 September 1962, from the Cologne DEUTSCHE ZEITUNG)

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Gentlemen, representatives of the Western world, note the following in your notebooks: Your time has run out. You are waiting for the GDR to disappear, but we wait for you to disappear from the surface of the earth.

I remember the days of my youth when we were fighting the White Guards. Then we said that our views and those of the White Guards did not differ very much: They want to bury us, and it is our intention to bury them. Now the question is posed in very much the same way. Yes, indeed, new things are pressing forward and there is no halting them. There are already some who (repeat?) that Khrushchev has said: We shall bury capitalism. Yes, I shall shout hooray when capitalism is being buried.

However, the burial of capitalism will be carried out by the working class, the working class in the respective countries. Each working class must itself bury its own capitalism. We shall merely salute them when they are doing it.

We shall not fight, and we shall not wage a war. We shall not wage a war in order to set up the socialist social order in any other country, for we are of the opinion that this is the concern of each people itself, the internal affair of each nation. But our friendly feelings and our sympathies are on the side of those who are the gravediggers of capitalism. May they also make a note of this!

(Speech on arrival in East Berlin for the 6th SED Congress,  
Approved For Release 2002/01/22 : CIA-RDP73B00296R000200040087-1  
19 January 1963)

III-7

The Chairman asked if there was anything else I wanted to discuss.

I said there was. In lecturing before various groups in the U.S., and in talking about the problem involved in a just and durable peace, I would constantly be confronted by people who would ask: "How can you talk about peace with the Soviet Union in view of the fact that Mr. Khrushchev has already declared war on us? He keeps saying he will bury us."

And so I asked Mr. Khrushchev how he would answer these questions.

"What I meant was, not that I will bury you, but that history will bury you," he said somewhat testily. "Don't blame me if your capitalist system is doomed. I am not going to kill you. I have no intention of murdering 200 million Americans. In fact, I will not even take part in the burial. The workers in your society will bury the system and they will be the pallbearers. Don't ask me when it is going to happen. It may not happen tomorrow or the day after. But it will happen. This is as certain as the rising sun."

I asked Mr. Khrushchev if he would be willing to consider evidence to the contrary.

"Please," he said.

(Interview with Norman Cousins, 12 April 1963, from the 7 November 1964 SATURDAY REVIEW)

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We must know that the enemy is now sharpening his poisoned ideological weapon for even more fierce skirmishes with us. It is as Red Army troops used to say during the Civil War: The Whites and we have only one question on which we cannot agree. It is a most simple question. It is a question of earth. The Whites want to bury us in the earth and we want to bury them. Who will bury whom first? This was the small question in dispute.

We have the same question with capitalism. It wants to bury the socialist system. We want to dig--and not only want, but have actually dug--a rather deep hole. We will continue to make every effort to dig the hole deeper and forever bury the capitalist system of exploitation, war, and plunder.

There is no doubt that capitalism will topple. However, it will not topple of its own accord. Our successes will inspire the

III-8

working class of all capitalist countries to a more determined and active revolutionary class struggle. We have helped them and will continue to help them by our example of building communism. People of various countries struggling for their freedom and independence are receiving our aid today. Tomorrow there will be even greater opportunities to give help of another type as well.

(Report to CPSU Central Committee plenum, 21 June 1963)

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We say, and are convinced of it, bourgeois journalists, representatives of the capitalist countries, that we will beat you in economic competition, and not simply beat you, so to speak, but we will beat you in the form of higher production organization. Only please understand me correctly, for I once said that we--that is, the communist system--will bury capitalism, and the bourgeois ideologists began to distort my words, stating that I would bury capitalism with a spade. Why should we need that? It is not we who will do that; it is the working class, the working people of the capitalist countries themselves who will put an end in their countries to the capitalist system of oppression and violence and will establish their own power. This is how we understand the question of the inevitable victory of socialism and of communism over the capitalist system.

(Speech at mass meeting in Split, Yugoslavia, 24 August 1963)

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[Perhaps another indication of Khrushchev's sensitivity to the "bury you" charge came on 12 January 1964 when IZVESTIYA, in printing all but fourteen lines of the President's State of the Union address, deleted Mr. Johnson's remark that "we intend to bury no one--and we do not intend to be buried,"]

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